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Theatre architectures

At the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space earlier this year, four very different theatres were recognized with awards in the competitive [Performance Space Exhibition](#). Of the four winners, one was a strikingly sculptural outdoor concert platform ('Soundforms'); another a minimalist multi-purpose polished concrete auditorium ('Dox+'); the third a temporary construction of recyclable wooden pallets and netting sited in a fallow field ('Theatre in the Wild'); and the fourth a combination of stage and table that seemed to flow between two trees in the grounds of a manor house ('Levitating Theatre'). Each negotiated the relations between performers and audience, and between location, materials and aesthetics in very different ways. That the competition was, in effect, a four-way tie was recognition of the sheer diversity on display among the 42 entries that were submitted in response to architect Andrew Todd's open call on the theme of 'Our Theatre of the World'. It was also further evidence that the question of what constitutes contemporary performance space or what a theatre might be remains an open one.

This issue on 'Theatre Architectures' examines the relationship between theatre and architecture through focusing on the work of scenographers and performance designers. It attends to the movement and migration of artists and practices across and between disciplines, with a particular focus on how artists are critically re-appraising and re-appropriating historic theatre typologies and performance traditions. Scenography's expanded and inclusive critical remit, its embrace of a wide range of spatial practices and new media, and its exploration of the agency and performativity of objects and materials is reconfiguring its historic relationship with architecture. Scenography and performance design are now concerned as much with the authoring of social space and experience as they are with the specifics of design for theatrical performance. Given this, how are scenographers, scenographer-architects and performance designers engaging with and re-authoring architecture, and what might be the implications of this for the design of theatres and performance spaces? The contributors to this issue attend to how scenography and performance design critically intervene in the positioning of spectators in relation to theatre architecture, urban development and rural ecologies, creating situations for encounter and reflection.

The use of the plural form of 'architectures' in the title for this issue directs us towards the diversity of possible architectures in theatre. While the obvious reference is to the theatre building itself, its various historic and contemporary manifestations, and the sorts of relationships it mediates between theatrical events and the broader environment, it also suggests different manifestations and uses of architecture in theatrical performance. Architecture can appear as scenic background, exist as material presence, or perform as an active ingredient. Beyond this, 'theatre architectures' also invites consideration of the architectural nature of the act and event of theatre. As a spatial practice, theatre produces space. Site-specific, relational and peripatetic modes of performance making may have in many respects rejected conventional theatre architectures, but they nonetheless produce and organize performance spaces in which spectators are relocated and reoriented in relation to the world around them.

Perhaps, taking the verb rather than the noun, we might say that, via scenography and performance design, theatre *architectures*.

The first article in this issue, by Fernando Quesada, examines Spanish architect Javier Navarro de Zuñiga's unbuilt 1971 proposal for a Mobile Theatre. Quesada's thoroughgoing contextual analysis of the Mobile Theatre reveals how it functioned as a critical gesture through navigating and articulating the principles of the neo-avant-garde and the spatial archetypes of popular performance traditions.

Shauna Janssen's contribution explores the potential for performance design to operate as a method for critically engaging with the spatial politics of urban change. Discussing the case study *darlingARCADE*, a site-specific installation by 2boys.tv (artists Stephen Lawson and Aaron Pollard) in the Montreal neighbourhood of Griffintown, Janssen argues that the project operates as a mnemonic practice enabling critical reflection on the commodification of the urban landscape.

Dorita Hannah reflects on her curation of the exhibition *NOW/NEXT: Performance Space at the Crossroads*, which formed the Architecture Section of the 2011 Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. In reviewing the design, curation and programming of the exhibition and its various strands, Hannah identifies how she sought to perform her own research as a sceno-architect through enabling the 'necessary presence of the real'.

Jozef Wouters' 2015 performance *Infini 1-15*, created in collaboration with the members of his group Decoratelier and invited artists, is the subject of Jasper Delbecke's article. In discussing *Infini 1-15*, Delbecke examines how theatre space might exist as an essayistic space where dialogue, hesitation and uncertainty might be staged. At the same time, Delbecke also argues that *Infini 1-15* – performed at the Royal Flemish Theatre in Brussels – served as a speculation on the future of the infrastructure of the *salle à l'italienne* and the aesthetic regime it embodies, and sought to re-instantiate the theatre as a semi-public space of dialogue.

Efrat Shalom's interview with Oren Sagiv provides fascinating insights into Sagiv's practice as architect, performance designer and curator, a practice that Shalom frames as 'straddling the seam' between disciplines. As an architect-scenographer, Sagiv reveals his interest in structuring situations and creating spaces for encounters, something which informs his approach to installation-architecture as well as to the curation and design of exhibitions.

Returning to theatre design practice, Richard Allen stages a performance lecture on the phantom life of the theatrical floorplan on the space of the page. Identifying the floorplan as the 'first mechanism of realisation', Allen discusses how the theatricality of the floorplan is located in its absences. Ranging across examples from theatre and film, Allen discusses Jo Mielziner's designs for the original 1949 production of *Death of a Salesman*, Lars Von Trier's *Dogville* (2003) and Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* (1977), the latter serving as an example of a groundless text as floorplan.

Marjolijn Guldemon and Barbara S. Krulik's contribution takes the form of a photographic essay that documents Guldemon's site-specific work *Compost-en-scène*, a site-specific installation performance created for the 2014 Oerol Festival on the island of Terschelling in the Netherlands. The images reveal how the work played with changes of scale, framing and reframing the landscape and its processes; they reveal its meditation on the materiality of compost and its dual existence as fertilizer and building material; and they communicate the evident gentle good humour of the piece. Through image and text, Guldemon and Krulik invite us to reconsider our relationship with the biological systems and cycles that nurture our existence.

My thanks to Arnold Aronson and Jane Collins for the invitation to guest edit and for their advice and guidance in preparing the issue. Thanks to the reviewers who provided careful consideration of the articles that appear here, and to Nick Tatchell for his patient organization behind the scenes.

Notes on contributor

Andrew Filmer is Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance at Aberystwyth University. His research examines sites of encounter between performance and architecture, and performative explorations of endurance running. Andrew is the co-editor of *Performing Architectures: Projects, Practices, Pedagogies* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and is co-convenor of the International Federation for Theatre Research's Theatre & Architecture Working Group.

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